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Maine Women's Lobby News Letter (1996 - August) No.16

Maine Women's Lobby Staff

Maine Women's Lobby

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MAINE WOMEN'S LOBBY

August 1996

Number 16

Paper Mills, Dioxin and Our Health

On January 14, 1996 a *Maine Sunday Telegram* headline announced: "(Governor) King to Paper Mills: Get Rid of the Dioxin." Why should women be concerned about dioxin?

For over ten years, health officials in Maine have warned women of childbearing age NOT to eat fish in 150 miles of Maine's rivers below kraft paper mills, and NOT to eat lobster tomalley along the entire Maine coast. WHY? Dioxin is a highly toxic chemical that is created as a by-product of several industrial processes that use or burn products containing chlorine. Sources of dioxin include incinerators and paper mills that use chlorine to bleach their products (known as kraft mills). Dioxin, once discharged, stays in the environment for a very long time.

Dioxin affects our health by interfering with the expression — the turning on and off — of genes in the body. It disrupts hormonal, reproductive and immune systems and harms the developing fetus. The Environmental Protection Agency's draft Dioxin Reassessment report provides compelling evidence that dioxin is more toxic than previously believed. Dioxin is a carcinogen on a par with formaldehyde, chloroform, PCBs and DDT. The average American woman already carries a background level (called a "body burden") of dioxin in her body that is at or near a level where harmful effects may occur.

Babies are exposed to dioxin both *in utero* and then through their mothers' breast milk. Since dioxin accumulates in fatty substances,

breastmilk often contains high levels of dioxin. Although women are still advised to breastfeed their infants because of the well known advantages of breastmilk, women of childbearing age should consider eating less fatty food and a more vegetarian diet to reduce the amount of dioxin that is passed to their infants. One of the most important and powerful reasons for all of us to work to get rid of dioxin from all sources is so that nature's "most perfect food" is not contaminated with toxic chemicals.

Dioxin is found throughout our environment. It is in our water, our food and our bodies. All sources of this toxic chemical need to be eliminated. There are solutions. Nationwide, we need laws to regulate dioxin sources such as incinerators. In Maine, where paper mills are the single biggest generator of dioxin, we can work to eliminate chlorine from their bleaching processes. Chlorine-free technology exists to make paper without chlorine compounds, is used in dozens of mills world-wide, and does not discharge dioxin.

Recognizing the threat from dioxin and that solutions are available, Governor King recently announced that the kraft paper mills had agreed to eliminate dioxin discharges from their processes. We applaud this action but Maine people must keep the pressure on our decision-makers and corporate heads to make sure that these promises become reality.

MWL Member Evelyn deFrees is Legislative and Outreach Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine.

What You Can Do

★ Look for and request chlorine-free paper in your stores (for example, Marcal toilet paper and paper towels). Call the number below for a list of available paper products.

★ Join concerned groups who are meeting regularly to work on building public awareness of and strategies to address the threats of dioxin and the availability of solutions like chlorine-free paper. These groups write letters to decision-makers, make slideshow presentations, post rivers with fish consumption advisories, talk to paper suppliers, and plan policy directions.

★ Call Evelyn deFrees at the Natural Resources Council of Maine for more information on all of the above (1-800-287-2345 or 622-3101).

Letter from the Chair

Welcome to a new year of the Maine Women's Lobby. As the Lobby approaches its 20th anniversary there have been many accomplishments to reflect on and many new mandates to put into action.



The annual meeting in June was a great way to welcome all the new Board members. Being at the Blaine House really melded the Lobby's legislative purpose with the elegance and importance of the night. Welcome to all the new Board members.

The annual meeting also was the Lobby's chance to say farewell to Pierrette Kelley, the retiring chairperson of the Board of Directors. The Board wishes her well in her new ventures and knows that Pierrette will still be available for assistance and ideas when needed.

In attending this meeting I came away with a new and revitalized energy for volunteerism and the fulfillment of the Lobby's purpose. The Lobby has many challenges which it has set to better the lives of women and girls including the Women's Vote Project, releasing information regarding the economic status of women, and the "Take Our Daughters to Work" program.

The Board is energized to implement and shepherd these programs, but the Board and the Lobby would like to involve the membership and energize the membership to take a more active role in the Lobby's new purpose of optimizing the lives of Maine girls and women through public policy development and legislative action. The Lobby has taken on a large task with its new vision statement. The more members that can get involved to assist the Lobby achieve these goals the more satisfying the attainment of these goals.

Please call the Lobby office at (207) 622-0851 to see how you can help.

— Cynthia Mehnert

From the Executive Director...

Summer is usually a time for recharging, relaxing and re-focusing at the Lobby. However this summer has been incredibly busy!

We spent the first week of July moving and the rest of the month unpacking and throwing out old files. We are now located at 39 Green Street, Augusta. Our phone number and *mailing* address remain the same. We are delighted to be sharing space with the Family Violence Project, the AIDS Alliance and Pine Tree Legal Assistance.



In addition to relocating I have also been spending lots of time attending Commission meetings. I was recently appointed by the Governor to serve on the Commission to Study Poverty Among Working Parents. The Commission was established by the Maine Legislature last year as part of the welfare reform bill. Its charge is to look at economic, social and societal conditions that contribute to poverty among working families and to make recommendations to the next legislature.

The commission has 21 members representing a wide variety of interests and expertise. Representative Edward Povich of Ellsworth and Marc R. Mutty, Director of the Diocesan Office of Public Affairs for the Catholic Church, co-chair the Commission.

Sub-committees of the commission have been meeting throughout the summer and the full Commission will re-convene on Sept. 12. Public hearings are tentatively scheduled to be held in early fall.

Another exciting activity we are involved in is the Women's Vote Project. The Women's Development Institute (WDI) has been selected as an affiliate site for a national women's vote project. The week of Sept. 16-22 has been designated as Women's Voter Registration Week in Maine. WDI is working with a coalition of ten other women's organizations in the state to make this a successful effort. We will be coordinating a variety of activities that will focus on registering women voters during that week.

Please call the office at 622-0851 if you would like to become more involved in the vote project or would like additional information about the Commission.

— Laura Fortman

The week of September 16 – 22 has been designated as Women's Voter Registration Week in Maine.

THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT: Our Health May Depend on the Rich Diversity of Nature's Pharmacy

"Nature does nothing uselessly."

— Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1, Chapter 2

In Washington and Augusta, the Endangered Species Act has become a polarized debate of private property rights and short-term economic gain. But the implications of the Endangered Species Act run to a deeper, more human level.

Forty percent of all prescriptions written today are either based on or synthesized from natural compounds from different species of plants and animals. Not only do these species save lives, they also account for over \$40 billion worth of pharmaceuticals world-wide on an annual basis. Unfortunately, this vast untapped reservoir of natural medicinal substances is gravely threatened.

Human development accelerates the loss of species by as much as 1,000 times the natural extinction rate. Sixty-eight percent of the 250,000 species of the world's flowering plants are found in the world's tropical rain forests, which are being destroyed at an estimated worldwide annual rate of 41.7 million acres. Less than ten percent of known plant species have been screened for their medicinal values, and only one percent have been intensively investigated. Only a fraction of the estimated millions of species of invertebrate animal life have been classified, and most have not been studied. Obviously, not every plant or animal contains some miracle cure, but the reality is, when a species becomes extinct, *we simply don't know what we are losing*.

Here are just a few of the medical benefits we've obtained from animal and plant species:

- The bark of the *Pacific yew tree*, found in the ancient forests of the Pacific Northwest, is the source of *taxol*, currently the most effective treatment available for women with advanced ovarian cancer. Taxol has also been found to be effective in metastatic breast cancer, acute leukemias, and non-small cell lung cancer.
- More than three million American heart disease

sufferers would find their lives cut short within 72 hours without *digitalis*, a drug derived from the *purple foxglove*.

- The *rosy periwinkle*, a wildflower from Madagascar whose habitat is rapidly being destroyed, supplies *alkaloids* contributing to the drugs *vincristine* and *vinblastine*, critical components in the treatment of childhood leukemia and Hodgkin's disease. These drugs, when used in conjunction with other cancer therapies, help children with acute lymphocytic leukemia achieve a 99 percent rate of remission and sufferers of Hodgkin's disease achieve a remission rate of 80 percent.

Other possible contributions on the horizon:

- *Bears* are currently being studied for clues to treating *osteoporosis* because of their ability to hibernate for long periods of time without losing bone mass.
- The *Lake Placid mint* produces a recently discovered anti-fungal agent which could prove helpful in the *treatment of infections associated with AIDS*, cancer patients and others with impaired immune systems. This scrub mint plant is found exclusively on a 300-acre site in central Florida where it is listed as an endangered species.
- The endangered *desert pupfish*, with its remarkable ability to adapt to high salt concentrations, provides insight to *human kidney disease*.
- The *Houston toad*, which is on the brink of extinction due to habitat loss, produces *alkaloids* that may *prevent heart attacks* or act as an anesthetic more powerful than morphine.

Let's hope the politicians in Washington and Augusta will look beyond their threatened short-sighted actions on the Endangered Species Act.

Now, more than ever, we must protect our endangered species and preserve nature's pharmacy for future generations.

Obviously, not every plant or animal contains some miracle cure, but the reality is, when a species becomes extinct, we simply don't know what we are losing.

Susan Sargent

Environmental Information Center of Maine

Elizabeth Crandall Honored

Long-time MWL supporter and women's activist Elizabeth (Liz) W. Crandall was inducted into the Maine Women's Hall of Fame on March 2, 1996. Established by the Maine Federation of Business and Professional Women and co-sponsored by the University of Maine, Augusta, the Maine Women's Hall of Fame is dedicated to women who have made an outstanding contribution to improving opportunities for all Maine women. The induction ceremony is in observance of Women's History Month.



Liz was honored for her leadership on many fronts. As an environmentalist, she was instrumental in instituting resource conservation reforms in her town of Brunswick. Liz served on various committees at the local to regional level to improve the handling of hazardous wastes and to investigate alternative sources of energy.

Liz has also worked tirelessly for citizen rights. She helped promote the *Information Guide for Abused Women in Maine*, a publication designed to assist victims of domestic violence. Liz campaigned for the ERA, lobbied to protect welfare programs for women and children, and has worked to get out the vote. She served as legislative chair for AAUW and the Maine Home Economics Association; and worked to end discrimination in housing, credit, employment, and public accommodation against women, racial minorities, gays and lesbians, and people with AIDS.

To protect women's reproductive freedom, Liz has been a representative to the Maine Choice Coalition since its inception. She has advocated for parenting and school-based child care for teen parents in an effort to end the cycle of children bearing children.

During her acceptance speech, Liz thanked the many friends and associates with whom she has worked over the years for their kindness and camaraderie. She praised Maine's legislature for being accessible and for its high proportion of women legislators. She encouraged Maine citizens to take advantage of this accessibility and get involved in the political process!

Liz encouraged those attending the ceremony to join and support the Maine Women's Lobby by saying "...let me recommend that if you are looking for a new group to join and support financially, you should consider the Maine Women's Lobby. To maintain a lobby-

ist, even at a modest salary, is a great challenge."

We salute you, Liz, for your good works. Thanks for all you have done for the women of Maine. And thanks for your public support of and praise of our organization. Good luck in all your future endeavors!

(Portions of this article were paraphrased from Liz's acceptance speech and the Maine Women's Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony brochure.)

Maine Equity Fund

Over the next two years, as much as \$120,000 will become available for grants to meet the needs of Maine's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities, and to address issues of diversity and discrimination shared with other minority communities through the initiative of the Maine Community Foundation.

With the help of a challenge grant from the National Lesbian and Gay Community Funding Partnership, one of sixteen made to date nationally, the Maine Community Fund has created the Maine Equity Fund. MCF will receive up to \$30,000 per year for two years, to be matched by an equal amount of money raised locally to provide a \$120,000 funding pool.

The Maine Equity Fund will conduct a needs assessment that will inform our ultimate grantmaking strategy and priorities. Our needs assessment process will involve surveying as broad as possible a sample of G/L/B/T individuals, as well as a wide variety of service providers and community organizations currently serving these communities. This survey data, followed by some targeted focus groups, will establish what needs and issues community members perceive to be most significant, what resources currently exist to meet those needs, what approaches are currently working, and what programs most need our support.

We need your help! We will do our best to get these surveys into the right hands, but we know up front that many important points of view are likely to go unheard unless we get a great deal of help in distributing the surveys widely and in making sure that the surveys are actually returned to us. Because we know that you all have busy lives, we will do our best to make these surveys concise, and to make sure the survey results are put to good use.

The survey will be sent mid- to late August. If we overlook you (or your more hard-to-find friends and colleagues) or if you have suggestions or energy to offer, please call Marjory Love, at (207) 773-6164, or write to us c/o the Maine Community Foundation/*Maine Equity Fund*, P.O. Box 148, Ellsworth, Maine 04605.

Join Us for a Women's Forum

To keep our members informed and to encourage others to become active in the Lobby, various Board members will host Women's Forums this fall in their homes throughout the state.

Invitations will be sent to Portland area members to attend the first of these forums which will be held on Thursday, August 22nd, 1996 in Portland. At the gathering you will have the opportunity to:

- discuss political issues of importance to Maine women and their families;
- get to know more about the work of the Maine Women's Lobby;
- meet fellow Lobby members; and
- enjoy wonderful refreshments like smoked salmon, spinach vegetable dip and a variety of beverages.

The agenda for the first Women's Forum includes the following:

- a welcome and introduction by our hosts, Katherine Pelletreau and Elizabeth Sheehan;
- a brief overview of the Maine Women's Lobby and Women's Development Institute by Executive Director, Laura Fortman;
- a discussion of legislative accomplishments of the last (117th) session such as: transitional Medicaid benefits, maternity care, family violence and anti-stalking legislation;
- a discussion of the issues facing us in the upcoming (118th) legislative session, such as: civil rights, livable wage and anti-choice legislation.

There will also be time for questions and answers, as well as the opportunity to mingle with people who share a common interest in women and public policy.

Please come and bring a friend who might be interested in joining their voices with ours and supporting the important work of the Maine Women's Lobby. Membership support allows us to be a constant presence throughout the legislative session, ensuring that your interests are well represented. If you do not receive an invitation and would like to attend the August 22nd Women's Forum, please call Katherine at 772-6634.

Thank you for your support, and watch your mail and future newsletters for information about forums in other areas of the state.

**Don't
Forget!**

Portland Area Women's Forum
Thursday, August 22, 1996
6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Women's Forum

Thursday, August 22

6:00 – 7:30 p.m.

Portland

Breakfast of Champions

Invitees:

Steven Bost

Joe Brennan

William Clark

Susan Collins

John Rensenbrink

Thursday, October 3

7:30 — 9:00 a.m.

Location to be announced

Portland

Look for your Maine Equity Fund
Survey in your mailbox!

Candidates to Attend Annual Breakfast of Champions

The Lobby has invited the five candidates for the open U.S. Senate seat – *Joe Brennan, Susan Collins, Steven Bost, John Rensenbrink, and William Clarke* – to speak at this year's Breakfast of Champions. We have asked the candidates to state their views on the areas of priority to the Lobby: reproductive choice, violence against women, anti-discrimination and economic security for women. This should be an informative and lively panel, and clearly an event not to be missed.

Mark your calendars for Thursday, October 3rd. We will alert you as to the location in Portland as soon as possible. In order to make this event more affordable to a wider audience, we have reduced the price of the tickets to \$20. Hope to see you all there!

Are YOU Registered to Vote?

MWL Board**Executive Committee**

Cynthia Mehnert, Augusta, Chair
 Janice Bork, Thorndike, Co-Chair
 Carol Kelly, Falmouth, Treasurer
 Lillian Pease, Dresden, Secretary

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 Hilda Chow, Winterport
 Lillian Pease, Dresden, Chair
 Eileen Fingerman, Oakland
 Laura Fortman, Executive Director
 Mary Ann Turowski, Hampden

Membership and Member Relations Committee

Karen Hobson, Lewiston
 Amy Locke, Portland, Chair
 Jenna Mehnert, Augusta
 Katherine Pelletreau, Portland
 Elizabeth Sheehan, Portland

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 Sandy Butler, Bangor, Chair
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 Emily Howard, Brunswick
 Lisa Pohlmann, Coopers Mills

Women's Issues Leadership Council (WILC)

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 Martha Sterling-Golden, Brunswick



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 \$10 Student
 Name of School _____
 \$ _____ Other*

Women's Issues Leadership Council

\$1000 Champion
 \$750 Benefactor
 \$500 Sustainer
 \$250 Contributor

MEMBERSHIP FORM

*I want to help improve the lives of
Maine Women and their families...*

☐ My check, payable to the Maine Women's Lobby, is enclosed.

☐ I prefer to pay with my:

MasterCard # _____

Visa # _____

 SIGNATURE OF CARDHOLDER

☐ I would like to pay in _____ installments.

My contribution is \$ _____

Name _____ Home Phone _____ Business Phone _____

Address _____ Town _____ Zip _____

☐ I do not want my name given to other groups.

**The Maine Women's Lobby is committed to representing women of all economic means. Any contribution you are able to make will entitle you to membership.*



**MAINE
WOMEN'S
LOBBY**

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*"Optimizing the lives of
Maine women and girls
through public policy
development and
legislative action."*